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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000059

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E AND INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2015

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: RUMORED CHANGES IN DJIBOUTI'S TOP MILITARY BRASS

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Marguerita Ragsdale.  
For reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Sources told the Embassy Political Assistant that significant changes are expected in the country's top military commanders after Djibouti's presidential elections in April 2005. The projected changes include the retirement and replacement of Djibouti's only two General Officers. Subsequently, the shake-up would affect several senior colonels, including the primary interlocutor for the U.S. military, Colonel Osman Nour Soubagleh. The current military hierarchy has been in place since 1993. END SUMMARY

2. (C) Watchers of Djibouti's military have long awaited the retirement of Generals Fathi Ahmed Houssein, Chief of Defense, and Zakaria Chiek Ibrahim, Chief of Staff. Both are long over due for retirement and it is widely thought that President Ismail Omar Guelleh will use the opportunity in creating his new government after the April 05 elections to ask both Generals to step down. Front runners to replace the two Generals include (in rank order) Colonel Youssouf Kayad Guelleh, Deputy Chief of Staff, Colonel Houssein Djama Ibrahim, Commander of the Rapid Reaction Brigade, Colonel Osman Nour Soubagleh, Director of International Programs, Colonel Omar Bouh Goudadeh, Director of Human Resources, and Lieutenant Colonel Abdourahman Abdi Dembil, Commander of the Republican Guard and Defense Advisor to the President (currently in France attending War College).

3. (C) Recently, Post's Political Assistant was told by a source that Lieutenant Colonel Abdourahman was to be named Chief of Defense and Colonel Omar Bouh would be named Chief of Staff. Additionally, Colonels Soubagleh, Kayad, and Djama would all receive attach positions out of the country; Soubagleh to the US, Kayad to France, and Djama to Ethiopia. Such a scenario, if played out, would likely be viewed as an attempt by President Guelleh to attain greater influence over the FAD. Col. Kayad is generally regarded as the most competent manager of the front runners Colonel Soubagleh is generally considered the best connected to the presidency. However, both are hampered by sub-clan affiliation. Colonels Bouh and Djama are connected to President Guelleh by marriage.

4. (C) An additional position that could come into play post election is that of Minister of Defense. The current Minister of Defense, Ougoureh Kifleh Ahmed, is commonly viewed as incompetent and ineffective as Minister. However, as an Afar and leader of the rebellion from 1990-1998, he holds his position as part of a power sharing agreement that ended the armed campaign by the Afar. Although formerly a competent guerrilla fighter, his lack of sophistication and marginal administrative skills are seen by many senior officers in FAD as a hindrance to allowing the military from fully profiting from all the current attention given to them by the American and French governments. Because he is such a prominent Afar figure, Ougoureh's replacement at MoD would most certainly have to be balanced with the appointment of an Afar to some other equally important and prestigious position.

5. (C) COMMENT: How retirements and reassignments play out in the post election period will be most certainly influenced to some degree by personal attachments, clan affiliation, and historical loyalties. To the degree that individual competency plays a role will be a telling barometer of President Guelleh's priorities and values. END COMMENT

6. For INR/B:

Soubagleh and Kayad are members of the Oudahgob sub-clan.

Djama has a successful maritime transit company and is rumored to have recently declined a nomination as Djibouti's representative to the African Union's Peace and Security Council on grounds that he was being forced out of Djibouti. He has a reputation as ill-tempered.

Bouh also owns a brick factory

7. Khartoum minimize considered.  
RAGSDALE